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# STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT THE CANADIAN FIREARMS PROGRAM

## FACTS, FIGURES AND KEY MESSAGES

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Catalogue No. JS42-119/2003E  
ISBN No. 0-662-34416-2

June 2003

*Également disponible en français*

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# **1. GENERAL – THE PROGRAM**

## **Some Basic Information**

### **The Canadian Firearms Program:**

- licenses firearms owners,
- registers firearms to their lawful owner,
- develops and implements policy to meet public safety objectives (e.g. prohibition of certain weapons),
- helps to ensure consistent import and export controls.

### **An Investment in Public Safety:**

- provides police officers with valuable investigative tools to prevent crime and cut down on illegal firearms trafficking,
- supports firearm users in ensuring the safe storage and handling of firearms and by helping in the recovery of lost or stolen firearms.



## Working Together:

- The Centre works with other federal partners to deliver the program throughout the country, in particular: the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.
- Federal and provincial Chief Firearms Officers are responsible for all decision-making, administrative, and investigative work related to most licences, and authorizations to transport or to carry firearms. For example, they determine an applicant's eligibility to have a firearms licence and designate instructors for the Canadian Firearms Safety Courses.
- The Canadian Firearms Centre develops and distributes targeted information to police agencies and others to support them in fulfilling their responsibilities under the *Firearms Act*



**Note:** Bill C-10A contains amendments to the *Firearms Act* that improve access to program services and reinforce the Canadian Firearms Program's contribution to public safety. It is important to note that these amendments are not yet in effect as many require the adoption of related regulations.

Improvements to the Canadian Firearms Program do not only deal with legislative changes: in February 2003, the Government announced its action plan to strengthen the management and operation of the Canadian Firearms Program.

## **2. MANAGING COSTS/IMPROVING SERVICES**

### **Managing Costs**

- The Government acknowledged cost over-runs and the need to take action.
- Major technology costs have been contained.
- Program spending is being reviewed.
- Measures have been put in place to ensure a high degree of accountability for public funds.
- The Government is committed to managing costs and running a cost effective program.

## Improving Service

### ➤ **Licensing**

- **Individuals**

- Firearms licences for individuals are valid for a period of five years and during the first renewal cycle, the terms of these licences may be extended. This means that not all renewals will happen at the same time and unnecessary processing backlogs and associated service delays, will be avoided.
- Notices are sent to licensed firearm users, advising them when it is time to renew their licence.
- Measures have been put in place to process properly completed licence applications within 45 days, including the statutory 28-day waiting period.

- **Businesses**

- The terms of business licences are being extended from one to three years to reduce the administrative workload for businesses as well as for renewal processing.
- The licence requirements for business employees are now more consistent with the types of firearms businesses possess. This saves costs for employees who are not necessarily required to be licensed to possess restricted firearms.

➤ **Registration**

- Internet registration is working. It's a simple and faster way for firearm owners to register their firearms. On-line registration is currently free of charge.
- The Canadian Firearms Centre receives hundreds of registration applications daily via the internet. Four out of five registration applications are now received through its on-line services.



- Individuals still have the option to register their firearms by using a paper application. A processing fee of \$18 is applied.
- Properly completed registration applications are being processed within 30 days, whether submitted on-line or by paper.

## ➤ Transfers

- The transfer process is accelerated. The approval of the Chief Firearms Officer is no longer required for transfers of non-restricted firearms to individuals, or for transfers of any type of firearms from one business to another.
- An on-line transfer service that is much faster and easier is available specifically for the transfer of registered, non-restricted firearms between businesses and individuals, and for the transfer of any class of registered firearms between businesses.

- **Faster Process for Importation by Non-Residents**
  - To save time and reduce administrative processes at points of entry into Canada, a pre-processing of declarations will be available for the temporary importation of firearms by non-residents. Pre-processing also allows for better background checks on visitors bringing firearms to Canada.
- **Faster Call Centre Response Times** – Response times on the 1 800 731-4000 information line are much faster and access is easier.
- In addition to offering on-line services to firearm users, the Centre's web site provides Canadians with direct access to information relating to all facets of the program, including news releases, special bulletins for firearms owners and users, legal texts, and research materials.

### **3. SAFETY**

Firearms safety is everyone's concern. No-one understands this better than the vast majority of Canadian firearms owners.

#### **➤ Licensing – Background Checks**

- Background checks are conducted on every firearms licence applicant to enhance public safety. These background checks also provide grounds to refuse firearms licences to individuals who should not possess them, for example, where an applicant has a history of violence.
- An important safety feature of the Canadian Firearms Program is continuous eligibility checks. Firearms officers are informed of potentially dangerous situations involving a specific firearms licence holder and are able to take appropriate action. These checks help keep firearms out of the wrong hands.

## ➤ Registration

- Registration reinforces the responsibility and accountability of firearm users for their firearms.
- Linking firearm owners to their firearms encourages users to store them safely and securely to deter loss, theft or accidents. Proper storage helps keep Canadian homes and communities safer. Owners are also more likely to report a loss or theft.
- Registration makes it easier for police officers to trace the source of firearms recovered at crime scenes, and to identify the rightful owners.

➤ **Safety Training** – Firearms licence applicants must first pass the test for the Canadian Firearms Safety Course. This assures the safety of the public and the applicant. The Canadian Firearms Safety Course has a worldwide reputation for excellence.

➤ **Storage, Display, Transportation and Handling of Firearms Regulations** – These measures encourage safe storage and handling of firearms, help keep firearms out of harm's way, particularly away from children, and contribute to reducing firearm theft.



**Making a Difference in People's Lives** – There are many real-life examples of the difference the Canadian Firearms Program is making to enhance public safety and combat crime. Consider these examples:

- Following a seizure of a prohibited firearm in a Western Canadian city, police discovered that the gun was registered to a local gun collector. The registered owner had not reported the gun lost or stolen. A search warrant was executed and police determined that several guns were missing from his collection and the registered owner seemed not to be aware they were gone. Although most of the collection was legally registered, several guns were not. Charges have been laid and the case is before the courts.
- Police were called to a residence after an occupant noted her spouse was very depressed and was talking of suicide. Police took the firearms that were known to the caller. Police subsequently checked the computer that links to the Canadian Firearms Registry and discovered that 20 additional firearms were registered at that address. The wife was unaware of their presence. All firearms were found and removed and the licence was placed under review so that the licence holder could not make further acquisitions.

#### **4. LAW ENFORCEMENT – A BALANCED APPROACH**

Some opponents of the program say, for example, that the average Canadian, or a senior citizen who finds a firearm in their attic, will be imprisoned and turned into criminals. Such general statements are simply NOT TRUE.

Police have numerous discretionary enforcement options at their disposal. They have had and will continue to exercise their discretion as they have done so successfully, reasonably and professionally for decades.

#### **What the Program does do:**

The Program provides important support to police officers and other law enforcement agencies.

#### **➤ National Weapons Enforcement Support Team (NWEST)**

- NWEST was created in January 2001, in response to police concerns about the problem of illegal firearms trafficking and violence involving firearms.

- NWEST consists of a network of 34 police agency members located throughout Canada.
- In April 2003, NWEST was moved from the Canadian Firearms Centre to the National Police Services, which is administered by the RCMP on behalf of all police forces in Canada.
- NWEST plays a crucial part in helping front-line police enforce the *Firearms Act* and in helping increase public safety by providing investigative support, training and briefings, analytical assistance, firearms tracing and expert witnesses.
- NWEST also works with authorities in other countries to combat the illegal movement of firearms.
- In 2002, NWEST has helped with over 3,100 police investigations, conducted more than 1,900 firearm traces and provided about 500 information sessions to the policing community.

Here are a few examples where NWEST played a crucial part in helping police increase public safety:

- NWEST supported police in Western Canada when an individual involved in divorce proceedings became upset in a courtroom and later threatened to kill those involved in the proceedings. They helped determine that the suspect had recently received a firearms licence and had three handguns registered to him. The investigation led to an arrest and seizure of the guns.
- NWEST provided support in a police investigation in Atlantic Canada where a suspect threatened to get a gun and shoot up his workplace. NWEST assisted with the preparation of a warrant and conducted firearms registry checks that determined that the suspect had nine firearms (both restricted and non-restricted) registered to him. The nine registered firearms along with one prohibited weapon were seized.



## ➤ **Canadian Firearms Registry On-Line (CFRO)**

- CFRO is a database that contains certain information from the Canadian Firearms Registration System database. Police officers can access CFRO quickly to link firearms and their owners.
- CFRO saves police officers time and enhances police and public safety by quickly providing police with specific firearm information when responding to potentially violent situations.
- With the CFRO, police officers can trace owners of recovered and seized firearms and evaluate potential threats to public safety. Police are tapping into the CFRO about 2,000 times per day.

## ➤ **A Direct Line for Police**

- In November 2000, the Canadian Firearms Centre established an Information and Referral Line dedicated to respond to police needs.

- The Information and Referral Line for Police is a service that provides a single point of contact with the Canadian Firearms Centre. It answers police officers' queries concerning the enforcement of the *Firearms Act* and their responsibilities under the Act.
  - Since its establishment, the Information and Referral Line for Police has received more than 4,500 calls from enforcement agencies across the country.
- **Web Site Portal for Police** – A portal has been set up to provide police with “one-stop” shopping for all their information needs.
- **Firearms Reference Table (FRT)** – The Firearms Reference Table contains approximately 90,000 descriptions of firearms, including makes and models. It is a very useful reference tool used by police and others involved in the firearms program, as well as by the international community.

**Support for the Program** – The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Police Association, and others on the front line are behind the program. They have said:

- "We... consider the licensing of firearms owners and the registration of firearms to be a valuable public safety tool for front-line police officers." (David Griffin, Canadian Police Association, January 14, 2003).
- "It [the program] is without question an investment in the future of our country and our children. The new law brings us in line with other industrialized nations and is an important part of a coordinated international effort to fight the illicit trafficking of firearms and organized crime." (Chief Vince Bevan, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, January 8, 2003).

## **5. IMPROVED MANAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

- The government's action plan announced on February 21, 2003, contains measures that will improve the management, efficiency and accountability of the Canadian Firearms Program:
  - A **Continuous Improvement Plan** focuses on opportunities to achieve program efficiencies, improve client service and enhance overall compliance.
  - **Headquarters has been consolidated** in one site and processing sites are under review to achieve efficiencies and reduce costs.
  - A **Commissioner of Firearms** has been appointed. Reporting to the Solicitor General, the Commissioner has full authority and accountability for all elements of the program.
- The Canadian Firearms Program's contribution to public safety is important but it cannot come at any cost. These and other measures will ensure Canadians get good value for money from this investment.

## ➤ **Strengthening Accountability:**

- On April 14, 2003, the Canadian Firearms Centre became a separate agency within the Solicitor General's portfolio. The Canadian Firearms Centre will have its own budget and will be required to report all expenditures.
- An annual report will be tabled in Parliament, beginning in fiscal year 2003-04. It will provide full financial and performance information on the firearms program.
- The position of Chief Financial Officer (CFO) has been staffed. The CFO is responsible for full financial management and control within the Canadian Firearms Centre, as well as for risk analysis, data integrity and reporting to Parliament.
- Parliamentarians, stakeholders and Canadians will be asked to provide their views on how to improve the design and delivery of the program.

- A Program Advisory Committee (PAC) has been created to provide advice on how to improve quality of service to the public, further reduce cost, and implement the continuous improvement plan.
- Members of the PAC Committee will provide their services on a volunteer basis, with reimbursement only for approved expenses.
- An Annual Audit and Evaluation Plan will review all major components of the program over time, operating on a three-year cycle. The first report on results will be published in 2005.

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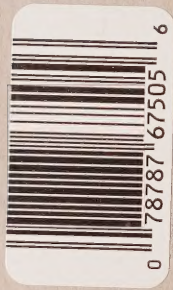












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